TASK FORCE RUSSIA -- BIWEEKLY REPORT 29 AUGUST-11 SEPTEMBER 1992 5TH REPORT

TASK FORCE RUSSIA (POW/MIA)

REPORT TO THE U.S. DELEGATION, U.S.-RUSSIAN JOINT COMMISSION ON POW/MIAs

11 SEPTEMBER 1992

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BIWEEKLY REPORT ON SIGNIFICANT ACTIVITIES

11 September 1992 TASK FORCE RUSSIA (POW/MIA)

1. SUMMARY: During the reporting period, Task Force Russia (TFR) recommended to the Department of Defense that it revise its position on the likelihood of the transfer of U.S. Korean War era POW/MIAs to the former Soviet Union. Although conclusive evidence has not yet been uncovered, the combination of interviews and circumstantial evidence from archives indicates a stronger likelihood of such action than had previously been understood. Otherwise, both the Moscow and Washington offices remained occupied with a wide range of interviews, archival searches and analytical work. Although no dramatic breakthroughs occurred, TFR analysts continue to build our capability to track the status of missing U.S. service members. The Russian side appears to be marshalling documents for release during the upcoming meeting of the Joint Commission. General Volkogonov stated that, should the Commission's work not be concluded by the close of 1992, the Commission could be extended.

2. UPDATE ON ISSUES FROM PREVIOUS REPORTS: In accordance with requests from the Russian side, TFR turned over a by-name list of missing Cold War air crews, complete with the necessary supporting data to facilitate an archival search. Given continued denial of access to the Podolsk and other archives, and the unwillingness to make key personnel available for interviews, Russian military and state security services appear to be blocking meaningful exploitation of their records. Viktor Pugantsev, the source in the Markin case, informed TFR-Moscow that he had been summoned to appear at a Ukrainian security service office, questioned about his contact with Task Force Russia, and told "not to stick his nose in where it didn't belong." TFR elected to delay action on the issue of the Kurile Islands possible grave sites until after President Yeltsin's visit to Japan. Now that the trip has been cancelled, TFR is again pursuing this lead. U.S. archival searches continue on all outstanding lists and individual names.

3. SIGNIFICANT INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED AND MEETINGS ATTENDED: The Moscow office conducted 8 meetings or interviews during the reporting period, while the Washington office conducted three interviews and attended or supported numerous formal and informal meetings. The most significant meetings and interviews are briefly summarized below:

--TFR-Moscow personnel met with Colonel-General Volkogonov, then with his aides, Colonel Volkov and Lieutenant-Colonel Osipov.

Subjects discussed included the upcoming Joint Commission meeting, a possible television appearance by Ambassador Toon, possible turnover of material from Yeltsin to Toon, and American graves in the Far East. As stated above, Volkogonov claimed the Commission would continue its work beyond 1992, if necessary. Volkogonov envisions a joint statement at year's end, and assured TFR that research is continuing in the Presidential Archives. TFR raised the issue of the Sanderson visit, stressing the need to

support the search; asked that further steps be taken to finally resolve the David Markin case; and presented Volkogonov with copies of the original U.S. government lists of airmen shot down during the Cold War. The general's aides were asked to arrange key interviews and to clarify the status of general staff documents declassified from the Korean War period. Osipov asked for copies of SOLDIERS OF MISFORTUNE and the U.S. agenda for the upcoming Commission meeting. He was also interested in the issue of the Kurile Island graves, and in Soviet XIA/MIA whose remains may have been recovered by the U.S.

MSG CITE: 150531Z SEP 92

--TFR-Moscow personnel met with Mr. Bruce Sanderson, son of MIA Lt. Warren Sanderson. Mr. Sanderson requested assistance from the Russian side in resolving his father's fate. [Incidental to this meeting, Mr. Valery Smirnov, a former GULAG inmate, easily identified a reputed MIA photo of PFC Milton Lawson as a friend and fellow inmate named Vladimir Schoebol. Schoebol was born in Belorussia, had served in the German SS during WWII, and was now out of the camps and (Smirnov believed) living in Belorussia again. Smirnov promised to attempt to contact Schoebel, as well as other Perm inmates, so that this individual case can be cleared.]

MSG CITE: 150531Z SEP 92

--TFR-Moscow personnel met twice with Mrs. Jane Reynolds - Howard and her daughter, who had come to Moscow searching for further evidence on the status of her former husband, Lt. Robert Reynolds. The Russian side, represented by Mr. Vladimir Kozlov, received her sympathetically and said that further information on the case would be released in the near future analyst's note-- probably at the Joint Commission meeting].

MSG CITE: 150531Z SEP 92

--TFR-Washington personnel met with Sergei V. Melnikov, a Russian emigre, photographer and journalist. Mr. Melnikov, who appeared sincere and genuinely concerned, provided TFR with letters from correspondents in the former Soviet Union and a video tape of interviews he had personally conducted. He provided only second or third-hand information, some of which was useful. Perhaps the most interesting piece of information was his remark that, when he had been in Khabarovsk, it was common knowledge that Americans either had been held or were being held in special camps somewhere between Khabarovsk and Komsomolsk. Mr. Melnikov proposed a business venture to TFR: if TFR funded him, he would return to Russia and the other republics and employ his network of correspondents in an unofficial, unilateral research and interview effort. TFR explained to Mr. Melnikov that we could not entertain such a proposal and that all of our work in Russia or the former Soviet Union was done in conjunction with our Russian counterparts. Mr. Melnikov, who runs his own news service, was clearly disappointed and asked if we could offer leads to other sources of funding. TFR explained that we were restrained from doing so. Mr. Melnikov nonetheless volunteered that he would pass any further information of interest to TFR.

MSG CITE: Melnikov interview notes

--TFR-Moscow personnel interviewed Mr. Valentin I. Dmitriyev, a geologist who made several trips to Vietnam between December 1986 and March 1989. He believes he may have encountered a group of 5-7 American prisoners under heavy guard west of Danang in March 1987. He described one of these alleged Americans as an Afro-American. As a geologist, Dmitriyev had used American-made maps in his work and he was able to pinpoint the location of the supposed camp. He also provided a 35mm slide of the barracks where he believes the prisoners were held. Upon receipt, we will forward all related material to DIA's office of POW/MIA affairs.

MSG CITE: 150531Z SEP 92

--TFR-Moscow personnel met with Colonel Yuriy G. Kobaladze, public affairs and press bureau chief of the Russian Intelligence Service. Kobaladze said that, of the 20 individuals from his service whom TFR

had requested to interview, 6 had no knowledge of U.S. POW/MIA's; 4 were dead; 4 could not be located; 1 was unidentified; 1 never worked for the service; 1 refused to be interviewed due to illness; 1 had been serving in England during the period in question; 1 worked for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs; and 1 worked for the Ministry of Defense. When asked about the archival research procedures used in searching for American POW/MIAs in the security service archives, Mr. Kobaladze was not helpful.

MSG CITE: 150531Z SEP 92

--TFR-Washington personnel conducted an informal telephonic interview with Colonel (USAF) retired Walter "Bud" Mahurin. Col. Mahurin was a POW for 16 months during the Korean War. He had been identified by one retired Soviet officer as a U.S. POW from Korea whose capture the officer had personally witnessed. The Russian source also remarked on the fact that Mahurin spoke Russian, speculating that Mahurin would have been a likely candidate for transport to the (former) USSR, had such transports taken place. Col. Mahurin claimed to have had no contact with Russians and to know of no POWs who did. He stated that he was interrogated only by North Koreans and Chinese, and that he was never taken farther north than the Yalu River. Col. Mahurin agreed to visit TFR - Washington during an upcoming visit to the area.

MSG CITE: Mahurin phonecon notes

--TFR-Moscow personnel met with Ms. Maya L. Kofman, a local national and member of the "Memorial" society. Ms. Kofman wanted to know how the Commission was organized, expressing an interest in developing a similar organization to seek missing French nationals on the territory of the former Soviet Union. She provided information on a Frenchman named Richard Dushnik-Bleustan, currently a resident of Estonia, who, she claimed, has information about Americans in the GULAG system. An interview with Dushnik-- Bleustan will be coordinated through Dept. of State channels.

MSG CITE: 150531Z SEP 92

--TFR-Moscow personnel met with Rabbi Frederick E. Werbell, who is researching the Wallenberg case. He provided TFR with several leads on U.S. nationals, to include both archival and interview possibilities.

MSG CITE: 150531Z SEP 92

PLANNED ACTION: TFR will pursue all leads raised in the above interviews in accordance with Ambassador Toon's stated priorities, apparent credibility, and resources required. All leads raised by TFR-Moscow are cross-checked with U.S. archives and records as expeditiously as possible by the Washington office, with responses to Moscow as appropriate.

4. SIGNIFICANT LETTERS/PHONE CONTACTS: TFR-Moscow received five letters from local nationals during the reporting period. Two were not pertinent to the Commission's work; however, copies of these letters will be passed to Washington to insure complete files are maintained. The other three letters were:

--Letter from Mozgha about an American encountered in a psychiatric hospital in 1979, then seen again in 1986. The purported American went by the name of Vladimir, spoke English fluently and claimed he was a pilot.

--Letter from Krasnodar about an American national named Miller von Saidnets [analyst comment: More accurate transliteration would probably be Mueller von Seidnitz]. Saidnets, who claimed he had served in Japan then had been kidnapped in Berlin, was observed in Lodoga No. 1 Mining Camp, Komi ASSR, INTA P/L 388/11.

--Letter from Ryazan concerning Nel Goich [analyst comment: name probably incorrect; obvious variants: Neal George, Neil Church, etc.] reportedly born in New York in 1923, imprisoned in the Urals

for 8 years in 1946 and released in 1954. Goich took the Russian name Nikolai Mikhailovich Skorodinsky, but supposedly always dreamed of returning to his homeland. Died 12 May 1981.

ASSESSMENT: TFR-Washington has not yet received copies of these letters, but each summarized biography fits a different one of the patterns we see emerging in the cases of reported missing Americans, servicemen and civilians. The psychiatric hospital system would, indeed, have been a possible repository for once - highly-valued aviator POWs whose technical knowledge had become obsolete and who might, indeed, have suffered mental as well as physical damage during their imprisonment. Saidnets would fit the pattern of retained or seized individuals from the WWII/early Cold War period. Americans with Germanic names had a particularly difficult time with repatriation, and those native-born naturalized German-Americans who served the U.S. Govt. would have been especially suspect and, depending on their role, desirable as prisoners. Finally, Goich, while of the right age to be a WWII

MIA/POW who was not repatriated, also exhibits some of the traits of those Americans, often with East European ties, who were susceptible to the propaganda promises of the Soviets during the late Depression period and World War II. Each case deserves further examination.

PLANNED ACTION: TFR-Moscow will pursue each of these leads as appropriate.

5. SIGNIFICANT ARCHIVES OR OTHER DOCUMENTS OBTAINED: No archival material was received from the Russian side during the reporting period. As intimated by Gen. Volkogonov, we are likely to receive a series of documents transferred at the highest level during the upcoming meeting of the Joint Commission. Analysts from TFR - Washington continued to develop ties with U.S. archival offices.

6. SIGNIFICANT CONUS ACTIVITIES: Along with the activities highlighted above, TFR-Washington worked on the compilation of an initial, focused list of Korean War aviators to be submitted to the Russian side to help guide their research. This list will concentrate on officers and pilots whose knowledge and skills would have made them likely candidates for evacuation from Korea to the reported interrogation center at Khabarovsk (see synopsis of Korotkov interview in TFR Summary for period ending 28 AUG 92). Analysts also worked on the development of a model with variants tracing the possible progress of a Korean War POW/MIA from Korea through the Soviet security system to assist TFR in focusing its requests for archival data from the Russian side. TFR representatives also met with Mr. Paul Cole of RAND Corporation, who is employed on a project that somewhat overlaps our mission. Finally, TFR responded to allegations raised by the ABC television program "20/20." Our efforts focused on concrete issues, such as the matter of the four U.S. service members reportedly buried in Odessa under deceased Soviet soldiers. Our records indicate that the remains of at least two of the service members named by "20/20," Timmerman and Yates, have been accounted for and buried in accordance with the wishes of the families. These two appear to have died in Odessa in a documented accident, and analysts believe the likeliest explanation is that these, and perhaps the two others, were temporarily interred in Odessa, then exhumed and repatriated. The grave sites were then re-used for Soviets--thus, the old cemetery records reflect that four Americans were buried then that four Soviets were buried "on top of them" at the same site. TFR analysts continue to work the cases of the other two Americans, "Kairo" and "Larsom," and we are seeking the Odessa historian Shuvalov in order to be absolutely certain that we are not overlooking any missing U.S. service members. Other issues raised by "20/20" are part of TFR's ongoing program.

7. OPERATIONAL PRIORITIES: NO CHANGE. TFR continues to operate under the ten operational priorities coordinated with the Executive Secretary and appended to our 28 August 92 report.

8. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS:

A. Strongly recommend that the U.S. Delegation to the Joint Commission raise the issue of non-cooperation on the part of Russian security and military intelligence agencies during the September meeting.

B. Recommend that the effort to confirm that U.S. Korean War era POW/MIAs were transported to the

former Soviet Union concentrate on Khabarovsk, as well as other camps in the Soviet Far East and Siberia.

C. Follow up leads from the ABC "20/20" broadcast; specifically, locate and interview Mr. Roman Shuvalov, the Odessa historian, Alexei Lubanov, retired military member who served in the Tambov area when it was a POW center, Vladimir Penkov, Tambov city official, and Alexei Kirichenko, retired KGB officer in Moscow.